



## INTERAGENCY CONNECTION

### Chair's Corner



Last month, our FEB Executive Director had the opportunity to meet Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary, Ben Carson, during his visit to Oklahoma City. She was able to discuss the efforts of the Oklahoma Federal

Executive Board after the 1995 Bombing of the AP Murrah Federal Building, coordinating with the federal agencies relocated from the Murrah Building up to our current efforts and initiatives (in both Oklahoma AND Houston), coordinating with federal agencies in that compliment National initiatives.



April 25, 2017 was the kickoff for our **Leadership FEB** program with a "PREVIEW" forum at the Department of State, Office of Foreign Missions. The program will begin in May and participants will visit various federal agencies in the larger Houston area.

### May is full of promise!

We begin the month with our annual FEB Awards Ceremony on May 15<sup>st</sup> at the Mickey Leland Building. If you have not

yet registered to attend, a registration form is provided in this newsletter for your convenience.

Later that same week, we will have the first full-day **Leadership FEB** forum in the Alliance Building. A group of federal leaders have already met for a 'preview' day and demonstrated that they are just the sorts of leaders needed for the future of the Federal Government. Welcome aboard!

A new initiative we are pursuing is **showcasing our Federal Agencies**, their missions and how they affect the larger community in Houston. We want to do this by posting as many "mission videos" as possible to our Social Media outlet: <https://www.facebook.com/HoustonFEB/>. I hope many of you will send videos to [LeAnn.Jenkins@gsa.gov](mailto:LeAnn.Jenkins@gsa.gov), knowing that you may already have some, on hand, for community outreach. Our posting schedule will be determined by the number of videos we receive.

Numerous events and activities are planned for our FEB this year. When you attend one of these, please send me an email to let me know how you liked it. The more feedback we get, the better we can serve you! [Timothy.jeffcoat@sba.gov](mailto:Timothy.jeffcoat@sba.gov)

Tim Jeffcoat, Chairman

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## To Post or Not to Post, That is the Question

It is practically impossible to log onto any social media platform and not see someone expressing a political opinion.

The First Amendment protects federal government employees who use social media to express their objections to the administration's policies and orders and even to pending legislation. However, before hitting "post", federal employees should keep the Hatch Act in mind.

The Hatch Act prohibits federal government employees from engaging in "political activity" while on duty, in the workplace or in an official capacity at any time. "Political activity,"

however, is very specifically defined in the Hatch Act and does not include what most people think of when they use that term. Instead, "political activity" refers to any activity directed toward the success or failure of a political party, partisan political group or candidate in a partisan race (but not an elected official after the race). It does not include opining on or protesting current events or matters of "public interest" (which under the law actually is what you think it is) or liking a post objecting to a presidential nominee.

This seems clear, but given the changing nature of the federal workplace and the increase in the use of telework, mobile devices, email and social media while on duty, the line between personal and

professional activity is often blurred.

For example, an employee on a break between meetings at work who uses his personal cellphone to check Facebook and "like" a post by a partisan group may have committed a Hatch Act violation.

The U.S. Office of Special Counsel, which is charged with prosecuting Hatch Act violations, issued a guidance indicating that "federal employees are considered 'on duty' during telecommuting hours." Additionally, OSC advises that federal employees who

choose to display a political party or campaign logo or a candidate's photograph as their social media profile picture cannot post, share, tweet or retweet any items on that social media account while on duty or in the workplace because each action would show their support for a partisan group or candidate in a partisan race, even if the content of that activity is totally unrelated and not political.

Federal employees can avoid violating the Hatch Act by expressing their political opinions on their own personal social media accounts after

business hours. When in doubt, federal government employees should consult OSC or their agency's ethics offices.

Article reprinted from Federal Times Business Insights, March/April 2017 edition. The article is written by Isabel Cottrell, an associate at the Federal Practice Group with substantive experience in federal employment.



Isabel Cottrell

## *The Busier You Are, the More You Need Quiet Time*

In a recent [interview](#) with Vox's Ezra Klein, journalist and author Ta-Nehisi Coates argued that serious thinkers and writers should get off Twitter.

It wasn't a critique of the 140-character medium or even the quality of the social media discourse in the age of fake news.

It was a call to get beyond the noise.

For Coates, generating good ideas and quality work products requires something all too rare in modern life: quiet.

He's in good company. Author JK Rowling, biographer Walter Isaacson, and psychiatrist Carl Jung have all had disciplined practices for managing the information flow and cultivating periods of deep silence. [Ray Dalio](#), [Bill George](#), California Governor [Jerry Brown](#), and Ohio Congressman [Tim Ryan](#) have also described structured periods of silence as important factors in their success.

Recent studies are showing that taking time for silence restores the nervous system, helps sustain energy, and conditions our minds to be more adaptive and responsive to the complex environments in which so many of us now live, work, and lead. Duke Medical School's Imke Kirste [recently found](#) that silence is associated with the development of new cells in the hippocampus, the key brain region associated with learning and memory. Physician Luciano Bernardi [found](#) that two-minutes of silence inserted between musical pieces proved more stabilizing to cardiovascular and respiratory systems than even the music categorized as "relaxing." And a 2013 study in the Journal of Environmental Psychology, based on a survey of 43,000 workers, [concluded](#) that the disadvantages of noise and distraction associated with open office plans outweighed anticipated, but still unproven, benefits like increasing morale and productivity boosts from unplanned interactions.

But cultivating silence isn't just about getting respite from the distractions of office chatter or tweets. Real sustained silence, the kind that facilitates clear and creative thinking, quiets inner chatter as well as outer.

This kind of silence is about resting the mental reflexes that habitually protect a reputation or promote a point of view. It's about taking a temporary break from one of life's most basic responsibilities: Having to think of what to say.

Cultivating silence, as Hal Gregersen [writes](#) in a

recent HBR article, "increase[s] your chances of encountering novel ideas and information and discerning weak signals." When we're constantly fixated on the verbal agenda—what to say next, what to write next, what to tweet next—it's tough to make room for truly different perspectives or radically new ideas. It's hard to drop into deeper modes of listening and attention. And it's in those deeper modes of attention that truly novel ideas are found.

Even incredibly busy people can cultivate periods of sustained quiet time. Here are four practical ideas:

**1) Punctuate meetings with five minutes of quiet time.** If you're able to close the office door, retreat to a park bench, or find another quiet hideaway, it's possible to hit reset by engaging in a silent practice of meditation or reflection.

**2) Take a silent afternoon in nature.** You need not be a rugged outdoors type to ditch the phone and go for a simple two-or-three-hour jaunt in nature. In our own experience and those of many of our clients, immersion in nature can be the clearest option for improving creative thinking capacities. Henry David Thoreau went to the woods for a reason.

**3) Go on a media fast.** Turn off your email for several hours or even a full day, or try "fasting" from news and entertainment. While there may still be plenty of noise around—family, conversation, city sounds—you can enjoy real benefits by resting the parts of your mind associated with unending work obligations and tracking social media or current events.

**4) Take the plunge and try a meditation retreat:** Even a short retreat is arguably the most straightforward way to turn toward deeper listening and awaken intuition. The journalist Andrew Sullivan recently [described](#) his experience at a silent retreat as "the ultimate detox." As he put it: "My breathing slowed. My brain settled... It was if my brain were moving away from the abstract and the distant toward the tangible and the near."

The world is getting louder. But silence is still accessible—it just takes commitment and creativity to cultivate it.

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Written by [Justin Talbot-Zorn](#), a Truman National Security Fellow and public policy consultant. He has been a regular meditation teacher on Capitol Hill, where he also served as Legislative Director for three Members of Congress.

## **Leadership: It's Not Easy To Make It Look Easy**

Great performers of all kinds make it look easy. Great athletes and great musicians and great dancers all make their art look almost effortless. Great leaders do the same thing.

You've probably had a great boss. Think back to a time when it was great to go to work. You probably had a great boss then. If you weren't fortunate enough to have a great boss, you've certainly read or heard about them.

Great bosses always seem to know what to do and they seem to do it effortlessly. Problem solving is easy. They know how to handle dicey interpersonal issues. That's how it may be now, but, trust me, that's not how it was at the beginning.

### **Making It Look Easy Takes Time**

No great performer, or great boss for that matter, got good all at once. It takes time to get comfortable with the basics of the work. Then it takes time to develop the skills you need to make it look easy, even if it's not.

### **You Can Speed Up Your Development**

There's only one way I know of to speed things up. Instead of just doing and getting better by accident, take control of the process. I use the acronym PAR to outline it. Think of improvement as getting up to PAR.

**P is for plan.** Make a conscious choice about what you're going to work on and what you're going to do. My ebook, *Become*

*a Better Boss One Tip at a Time*, has more than three hundred suggestions to choose from.

**A is for act.** Do it. The first time you do anything it won't go perfectly. Accept that. Remember, you're working on this because you want to get better at it and you will get better as you work at it.

**R is for review.** After significant events and at regular times, like every evening or weekend, review how you did and figure out what you can do differently and better.

There's actually another R, and it stands for Repeat. Go back to Plan and continue the improvement cycle.

### **It Won't Be Easy**

Prepare to be uncomfortable, because that's how it is when we're learning new skills, especially in a social context. Prepare to be more uncomfortable if you accelerate the process. That's the price of progress.

### **Bottom Line**

The truth is that becoming a great boss is something almost everyone can do. It's not magic, it's method, and you can learn it. Pick something to improve, work on it, assess your progress, and do it again.

Written by Wally Bock

<http://leadchangegroup.com/leadership-its-not-easy-to-make-it-look-easy/>







## Full-Day Pre-Retirement Training Seminar-2017



*Be sure you are financially prepared to do all the things you've planned for your retirement!!*



### CSRS session topics:

- Overview of CSRS
- Survivor Benefit
- Thrift Savings Plan (to include Roth TSP)
- Voluntary Contribution Program
- Federal Employee Health & Life Insurance Programs
- Social Security
- Federal Long Term Care Program
- Flexible Spending Accounts
- Annuity Calculation
- Phased Retirement

### FERS session topics:

- Overview of FERS
- Survivor Benefit
- Thrift Savings Plan (to include Roth TSP)
- Federal Long Term Care Program
- Federal Employee Health & Life Insurance Programs
- Social Security
- Flexible Spending Accounts
- Annuity Calculation
- Phased Retirement

**DATE:** Wednesday and Thursday, August 16 and 17, 2017 (select which system)  
**TIME:** 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Registration will begin at 7:30 am  
**LOCATION:** Leland Federal Bldg, 1919 Smith Street, Houston  
**COST:** \$65.00 per person to cover expenses  
**INSTRUCTOR:** Instructor is compensated by First Command, these sessions are educational ONLY. Instructor holds neither license nor affiliation with any financial products.

☐ **Sign me up for the CSRS Only session on Wednesday, August 16, 2017**

☐ I am covered by a special retirement provision (Firefighter/Law Enforcement/Air Traffic Controller)

☐ **Sign me up for the FERS Only session on Thursday, August 17, 2017**

☐ I am covered by a special retirement provision (Firefighter/Law Enforcement/Air Traffic Controller)

☐ **I wish to sign up my spouse to attend at the reduced fee of \$50.00**

***Seating is limited to 75 per session***

Payment must be made in advance ☐ Check ☐ Credit Card—Phone #:

NAME(S): \_\_\_\_\_

Spouses are welcome to register, as well, at a reduced fee of \$50.00 for the registration fee.

AGENCY: \_\_\_\_\_

Please list your agency, organization and office symbol.

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Email to:

Gerald.Poole@gsa.gov

*Cancellation Policy: Understanding that unforeseen circumstances may preclude an individual from attending, refunds and cancellations will be permitted through August 10, 2017. However, after that date, registrations must be honored by the individual or agency involved. If you are unable to attend, substitute attendees are authorized and encouraged!*



## HOUSTON FEDERAL EXECUTIVE BOARD AWARD CEREMONY

Date:	Monday, May 15, 2017
Location:	Leland Federal Building, 1919 Smith Street, Houston
Time:	1:00 p.m.
Cost:	No fee (light refreshments will be provided)
Who should attend:	Federal Agency Leaders (or designee) and nominees



Celebrated the first week of May since 1985, Public Service Recognition Week (PSRW) is organized annually by the [Public Employees Roundtable \(PER\)](#) and its member organizations to honor the men and women who serve our nation as federal, state, county and local government employees.

Throughout the country, mayors, governors, agency leaders, communities and public service organizations participate in PSRW by issuing proclamations; hosting award ceremonies and special tribute events; and delivering messages about the value of public service. All government leaders and public servants from all backgrounds are encouraged to participate by showing appreciation to their employees and colleagues and by sharing stories of excellence in public service.

***As part of this effort, the Houston Federal Executive Board is hosting an Awards Ceremony to honor accomplishments of federal employees in the Houston area. We invite you to join us in celebrating those in Public Service during this special event!***

Please RSVP no later than April 20, 2017

### REGISTRATION

Name:	Phone:
Agency:	City:
Email:	

Email registration to:	<a href="mailto:Gerald.Poole@gsa.gov">Gerald.Poole@gsa.gov</a>
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Cancellation Policy: If you are unable to attend, substitute attendees are authorized and encouraged if within the appropriate management structure!

## 2017 Leadership FEB Class Registration

Return this portion to FEB



In order to maximize the benefits and expand the cohesive networking opportunities, no alternates will be authorized to attend single sessions. However, if an identified participant becomes unable to honor their commitment to the program, the employing agency is authorized to replace that individual for the duration of the program.

Participants **must attend a minimum of five sessions** in order to receive a certificate of completion for this program.

*Forums may involve agencies with missions that require background investigations prior to the visit. If a registered employee has findings, their participation in that particular forum may be denied.*

Due to limited availability, register as early as possible to reserve a slot for your participant. It is suggested that registrations be submitted no later than April 21, 2017. Cancellations will be processed at no charge to the agency through that date. After that, we ask the agency to honor their obligation due to cost incurred; however, a substitute participant is authorized and encouraged.

Tuition for the program is \$500. This covers *Leadership FEB* program expenses for each forum, leadership books, parking fees for designated forums, and other materials. Personal expenses, lodging, and mileage are not included in this cost. Tuition is payable by the individual, the employer, or the sponsoring organization. Tuition paid with the application will be held until the selection process is completed. Tuition will be refunded if the applicant is not selected. *Agency/Registrant may pay the course fee (\$500) by check, credit card, or government voucher*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Dept & Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Participant's Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Agency Director/Commander Review/Approval*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

By Mail	By Email:	Questions, Call:
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